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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 002144

SIPDIS

FOR STATE WHA JACOBSON, NSC RESTREPO, AND USAID KENNEDY.

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TAGS: [MX](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS REACHING FOR GREATER INFLUENCE

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor James P. Merz Reason
: 1.4 (b), (d).

Summary

¶1. (SBU) As Mexico's human rights record comes under increased scrutiny, Mexican civil society groups devoted to promoting human rights are receiving greater international exposure. These groups have documented a rise in the incidence of abuses, suggesting a deteriorating human rights environment. In addition to these concerns, Mexican human rights organizations face substantial challenges at home, including negative stereotyping and limited visibility. The Mexican public often characterizes human rights defenders as weak and accuses them of "defending delinquents." Human rights NGOs' often combative approach helps explain their somewhat contentious relationship with the Mexican government, often times restricted to one of symbolic discourse. As these groups improve their outreach to both the Mexican public and policy makers, we can anticipate their influence will grow. End Summary.

Human Rights Organizations Seeking a Wider Audience

¶2. (C) Often inaccessible or unknown to most Mexicans, civil society groups working in the area of human rights need to find ways to better connect with the Mexican public. Many NGO leaders complained to Poloff that the average Mexican would be unable to name a Mexican human rights NGO or to identify its mission. In their public discourse, many of these organizations assume an aggressive stance that is not always conducive to dialogue or negotiation. The president of the Institute for Security and Democracy (INSYDE), Ernesto Lopez Portillo, told Poloffs that most Mexicans don't understand the concept of human rights and with some characterized them as guerrilla sympathizers who defend delinquents.

Treading Water with the Feds

¶3. (SBU) All of the civil society organizations defending human rights with whom Poloffs spoke characterize their interaction with the federal government as frustrating and generally unproductive. They often note that Mexican politicians lack the political will to implement human rights reforms, citing the Chamber of Deputies Human Rights Committee's failure in 2007 to introduce proposed legislation advocating for greater human rights protections (after an extensive education and lobbying effort on the part of the Mexican NGO community). Of course, these groups need to

develop greater political savvy along with the political connections to prove more effective as lobbying groups. At present, these organizations often fail to adapt their message to their audience and tone-down their combative rhetoric to render lawmakers and politicians more sympathetic to their cause.

¶4. (SBU) Many human rights groups continue to consult with the federal government despite the fact that the dialogue is limited and registers uneven impact on policymaking. Representatives from FUNDAR, a center for analysis and investigation that is active in the human rights arena, told Poloff that these GOM consultations are the only mechanism where they can present their ideas to the government and where they can raise issues in a public forum to try to pressure the GOM to enact their policy recommendations. Human rights groups, however, complain that the federal government often presents these consultations to the international community as evidence that civil society condones the GOM's actions and approves of its policies, when this is often not the case. Some human rights groups, such as the Red Nacional de Derechos Humanos, recently refused to accept an invitation by the Mexican Foreign Ministry in the run-up the UN Human Rights Council's review of Mexico's human rights record because it felt that the government had called the meeting purely for appearance's sake. Other groups, including Centro Pro, describe their current dialogue with federal government entities as at a standstill.

¶5. (SBU) Human rights NGOs applaud the work of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) in documenting human rights

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violations and gathering evidence that is then passed onto human rights NGOs when the cases go to trial. Groups meet regularly with CNDH personnel and, in general, are certainly more aligned with the CNDH's views and goals than with the federal government's. However, although the CNDH is semi-autonomous of the GOM, human rights groups claim the organization often assumes a politically reserved or subservient stance on highly charged, politicized cases. And while NGOs recognize that CNDH often makes what they characterize as excellent recommendations to the GOM to address human rights concerns, they fault the organization for not pressuring the GOM to implement them.
Comment

¶6. (C) Improving the effectiveness of human rights groups in Mexico requires changing attitudes. Mexico's human rights NGOs continue to struggle against preconceived notions in Mexican society, and particularly among the Mexican political elite, who view them with disdain and possibly tied to leftist and guerrilla organizations. These groups need to improve their outreach to the Mexican public, possibly through large-scale education or awareness programs (potentially with the CNDH or with the international community) to teach citizens about human rights and build trust with the Mexican community. They also need to stop viewing dialogue with the government as a zero-sum game and recognize that regular exchanges with the government break down stereotypes and contribute to the kind of rapport that expands credibility. These groups have established ties to U.S. and internationally based groups in the U.S. that lends them influence in Washington far in excess of their direct influence in Mexico. As civil society in Mexico expands, these groups will inevitably assume a more important role in national debates over policies and programs when it comes to sensitive issues, such as combating organized crime and the role of security forces.

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